



Creating Legends

How to craft characters
readers adore... or despise!

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ProWritingAid



► INTRODUCTION

Characters are all in how you, the writer, present them.

The writers at **ProWritingAid** have put together this eBook of tips and tricks for creating legendary characters. If you want readers turning pages until the wee hours of the morning because they can't put your book down, make your characters unforgettable. And then put them in some tense situations.

This eBook is for all the writers out there who want to create compelling, engaging, relatable characters that readers will love... or hate.

Turn the page and let's get started!

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▶ CHAPTER 1. INVENTING CHARACTERS: A CHARACTER IS WHAT HE DOES, HIS MOTIVES, AND HIS PAST

Let's dive right into character inventing. Throughout this eBook, we'll be referring a lot to Orson Scott Card's *Characters & Viewpoint*, from the Writer's Digest series *Elements of Fiction Writing*. You can download [*Characters & Viewpoint*](#) from Writer's Digest or check a copy out of your local library.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS BETTER THAN YOU KNOW MOST PEOPLE

How well do we really know the people in our lives? Some we know better than others and some are merely acquaintances. But we expect to know many characters in books better than any living human being, don't we? We can read their minds and so understand their motivations, beliefs and dreams.

Characters in books give us insight into the human condition. We learn how people behave and about human nature from some of our favorite fictional characters.

Orson Scott Card says, out of the multiple ways to get to know someone, the ones that make the strongest impression are:

- What your character does
- What his or her motives are
- What they've done in the past

This list is a great starting point for getting to know your characters.

1 WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER DO?

Think about a recent party you attended. Now imagine if you'd seen a woman spilling her drink, laughing loudly, and generally calling attention to herself. You would make a snap judgment about her. It's OK, we all do it.

What would you think if you saw a man and woman meet each other for the first time and later saw them intimately locked together on the dance floor? Or what would you think about the friend who told you a secret "absolutely no one else knows," only to find out several other people heard versions of the same secret?

All of these character actions shape the reader's understanding of the kind of person they are.

Now think about Ian Fleming's James Bond. At the beginning of every movie, Bond is in the middle of some intense action. He's running from bad guys or he's chasing bad guys. The scene always wraps up in Bond's favor, and we see him with the Bond girl and a martini, shaken not stirred.

What do we know about Bond from his actions? He's suave, he's debonair, he's brave, cunning, and quite clever. And he has the best spy toys ever.

We know all that in the first 15 to 20 minutes of the movie. The writers and director didn't tell us. We all saw it on the screen.

If your main character looks at her phone, taps in a few things, and hops in her car with an Uber sticker on it, you can assume she's an Uber driver, even if no one actually tells you. Or if a character steals a loaf of bread, you assume he's a thief, but with it being food-related, there might be extenuating circumstances.

That's where the next element comes in.

2 WHAT ARE YOUR CHARACTER'S MOTIVES?

When someone steals food in a story, we wonder what's the motive, don't we? Almost everyone has either read or seen *Les Misérables*. Jean Valjean had a strong motive for stealing bread, one that made us empathize with him rather than abhor him for breaking the law.

Let's go back to our example of the woman at the party who's making a spectacle. What if her best friend Anna is throwing the party and in walks Anna's ex-boyfriend, for whom she still pines? The woman may be deliberately drawing attention so that the guests don't see Anna leaving the room with tears streaming down her face. Your perception of her changes, doesn't it?

What if you found out the friend who was telling different versions of the same secret to everyone felt horribly alone and depressed during the holidays? This



was her clumsy attempt to connect with someone—anyone—so as not to be by herself on Christmas day.

You can imagine any number of scenarios with the man and woman meeting for the first time. Maybe they're both spies and the meeting was planned. Or their actions would mean something different if you knew she was trying to get over the death of her husband while he was looking for someone weak to prey upon.

Orson Scott Card brings up an interesting scenario in his book. What about someone who tries to do something, but fails?

Imagine a man pointing a gun at the governor, but the gun misfires. Or, imagine a woman diving in a pool to save a drowning man, only to find that he's too heavy for her to get out of the water. You would still look at the man as an assassin and the woman as a hero, even though he didn't actually kill anyone, and she never saved anyone. As Card puts it:

“Motive is what gives moral value to a character's acts. What a character does, no matter how awful or how good, is never morally absolute: what seemed to be murder may turn out to have been self-defense, madness, or illusion; what seemed to be a kiss may turn out to have been betrayal, deception, or irony... A character is what he does, yes – but even more, a character is what he means to do.”

3 WHAT HAS YOUR CHARACTER DONE IN THE PAST?

Knowing someone's past helps us understand who she or he is today. You may meet a beautiful woman at a dinner party and only know her by her actions there. But what if the hostess told you beforehand that the beautiful woman had grown up as an ugly duckling in a cruel family and suffered from manic depression?

Or what if the hostess told you the woman was the CEO of a major corporation who had just laid off thousands of employees right before the holidays—one of whom was your partner?

What if you found out the beautiful woman had been held captive as a slave in another country since she

was a teenager and had recently escaped from her captors?

Each of these scenarios would make you look at this woman differently, right? So, people are what they've done, but also what's happened to them in the past. Card writes:

“Our past, however we might revise it in our memory, is who we believe that we are; and when you create a fictional character, telling something of her past will also help your readers understand who she is at the time of the story.”

OTHER ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Orson Scott Card lists several other elements you need to cover to create a truly unforgettable character:

REPUTATION

Everyone has a reputation, good or bad, deserved or undeserved. Your character's reputation shapes other characters' judgment of them. You can use reputation to help you define your character or to show a different side that others don't see.

STEREOTYPES

We all stereotype people we see, usually unconsciously, because it's our brain's way of classifying and understanding people. The more someone is like us, the more comfortable we feel. Characters who violate a stereotype grab our attention; they surprise us by acting a different way. We want to know more.

DIFFERENT SIDES

We all have different sides we show to different people. We're one person at work, another at home, and even another out with our friends on a Saturday night getting crazy. Card says, “It is also one of the most startling and effective devices in fiction to take characters out of one setting and put them in another, where different facets of their personality come to the fore.”

HABITS AND PATTERNS

Does he always keep his desk just so and struggle when anything is out of place? Does she just keep talking and talking if ever there is the potential for silence? You can use your character's habits and patterns against them, or a change in those habits can suggest a change in their life.



TALENTS AND ABILITIES

Does he write beautiful poetry in his spare time? Maybe she can sing like a song bird but is too shy to sing in front of people. Especially for fantasy and Sci-Fi, your main character needs to have a unique talent or gift that helps them do great things.

TASTES AND PREFERENCES

We all have different tastes and preferences: our favorite foods, movies, books, clothes, cars, and a host of other “likes.” Give your protagonist distinctive tastes and preferences to spice things up a bit or to show a different side.

BODY STYLE

Lastly, but not least, is the physical description. Most writers think if they nail a good physical description, they’ve created a compelling character. This is exactly why Card mentions body as the last element in his book. If you want to create an unforgettable character, the other elements are just as important as the way a character looks. Consider how you can use the way someone physically looks to help readers understand how that character feels about themselves or how others treat them.

Think about the first time you met your best friend or your partner. Each of the elements discussed above are different ways of getting to know people. It’s also how your readers want to get to know your characters. Cover them thoroughly in your story, and you’ll create another Jane Eyre, Ender Wiggin, or Frodo Baggins.



▶ CHAPTER 2. BELIEF, EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT, CLARITY: WHAT EVERY CHARACTER NEEDS

Now that you've invented your characters, it's time to think about building the reader's relationship with them.

Orson Scott Card discusses the three questions readers ask, ones for which you better have a superb answer. They are:

1 SO WHAT?

When a reader comes across a character in a situation in your story, they ask: "Why should I care about this person? Why is this important?" You need to convince them. Because if you don't, Card says they will go downstairs and watch TV.

2 OH, YEAH?

This question covers inherent disbelief when someone reads something. While readers will suspend disbelief to a point, they can still smell when something's not right. You don't want your reader to say, "I don't believe anyone would do that," or "That's not how things work."

3 HUH?

You never want readers suddenly to say, "What's happening?" without giving them reassurance that all will be explained. You don't want readers stumbling and wondering who's talking or what's even happening. They'll close your book, and it's doubtful they'll pick it back up.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

It's your job as the storyteller to know when a reader is about to say, "So what?" and to give them a reason to care. And whenever a doubt creeps in and they're mumbling "Oh, yeah?" you'll give them the clue they need or a logical reason to keep them believing.

On those necessary occasions when you need to keep something from your readers, you won't leave them wondering what's going on. You'll either drop a clue or make sure they understand the question that's being asked right then in your story. Readers need to know you purposefully left them in the dark so they stay with you.

Short stories don't have as many characters to worry about, but novels have a cast about which readers will

unconsciously ask these three questions. You, as the storyteller, must answer each of the questions for every major character in your tale.

Present your readers with belief, emotional involvement and clarity, and they'll stick with you.

HOW TO WRITE FOR THESE THREE QUESTIONS

Orson Scott Card writes, "You are the first audience." If you don't get excited about your characters and what they're doing, you can't expect your readers to react. If you don't care deeply about each character, it will come through clearly enough in your writing, and your readers won't care either.

But finding a story and characters that feel right—who are important enough to make you want to tell their story—is like discovering gold. At that point, you're no longer writing for yourself. You're writing for the world to understand what they see, think, and feel.

So, if your fingers aren't tingling and itching to get to pen and paper or keyboard, you need to find another character or make the current character more interesting. But how do you do that?

Card says you interrogate your characters. Here are the questions you start with:

- Why would he do such a thing?
- What made him do it?
- If he does it, what will happen as a result?

These questions focus on cause and result. Don't stop with the first superficial answers you find. Continue asking "Why?" and "What happens?" and "What can go wrong?" After you've drilled down to something that's elemental, you'll know when you've hit the mother lode.

Then you throw in a twist. Perhaps you assumed your character was a responsible individual, but what if that's not true? **Take your assumptions and give them a twist to make your characters more interesting.**

Card says it's important to keep asking the questions because your first several answers will most likely be



clichés. Turn this bright spotlight on each of your ideas and characters to get to the essential stuff at their core.

Don't settle for clichés; your story will be stronger and deeper because you kept "asking questions until you came up with something really good."

IDENTIFYING YOUR MAIN CHARACTER

What if you have a great story idea but can't decide which of your characters to base it around?

Card says the key question to ask is: "Who suffers most in this situation?" Interrogate your characters to find out who they are. **The one who has the most to lose or who will almost die will be your main character.**



▶ CHAPTER 3. WHAT ARE ROUND CHARACTERS AND WHY DO YOU NEED THEM?

In his 1927 book *Aspects of the Novel*, EM Forster explained that a fully dimensional, fleshed out character is imperative in any story not devoted entirely to plot. He wrote:

“The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round. [A round character] has the incalculability of life about it—life within the pages of a book.”

WHAT IS A ROUND CHARACTER?

If you think about your favorite characters, they're as real to you as someone you know. You have a personal connection with them that makes you care deeply about what happens to them. This is because they are round characters.

A round character is one who is complex, lifelike and unexpected. They have multi-faceted personalities with intricate backgrounds, motivations, and desires. Conversely, a flat character lacks complexity, which means they don't ring true to life.

Your novel's main character must be round so that your readers come to know and understand him or her deeply by the end of your novel. But any character in your novel should be round if your reader needs to identify with him or her.

Remember: a round character isn't necessarily likable. Nor must they be interesting. The only non-negotiable is that they are multi-dimensional.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A ROUND CHARACTER

Round characters have personalities and traits that aren't always consistent, and generally you make them change or learn something by the end of your story. They experience challenges and contradictory situations that transform them, making them more realistic and believable.

A round character can still surprise your reader. It's your job as the writer to have your main character act in unexpected ways that are ultimately convincing.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ROUND AND DYNAMIC CHARACTERS

DYNAMIC CHARACTERS

Ones who change fundamentally by the end of your story.

ROUND CHARACTERS

Ones who have many facets to their personality. They are complex.

Not all round characters must be dynamic. To be dynamic, your character must change in a significant or extreme way by story's end. Generally, a dynamic character's development is important to your book's plot or theme.

Being round, however, means your character has layers like an onion. You could never describe a round character using one or two adjectives. Just like the real people in your life, rounds represent complicated individuals. They contradict themselves through their motivations and desires, but they don't necessarily change.

EXAMPLES OF GREAT ROUND CHARACTERS

Let's look at a few examples from popular novels to help you understand round characters better.

THE GREAT GATSBY

Jay Gatsby is a man of mystery. But by the end of the novel, you understand him a lot better. You learn about Gatsby by how others see him, how he behaves and interacts with the characters, and how his background is revealed. Readers discover that Gatsby's obsession with Daisy drove his entire adult life. Through the narrator Nick's eyes, we learn about Gatsby in all his complexity and human emotions.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett is a thoroughly round character who is also dynamic. She's prejudiced,



which is her major character flaw, but she changes her opinions and transforms by the end of the story. The perfect match to her prejudice is Mr. Darcy's pride that impedes him discovering people for who they are. Both these characters slowly and gradually evolve until their true feelings become known.

HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS

You probably wondered if Severus Snape was a bad or good guy, but JK Rowling developed him over the course of the series into a thoroughly round character. It's when Harry falls into Snape's memories in the Deathly Hallows that he truly sees Professor Snape as far more complex. You learn that Harry's mother and Snape were childhood friends, and that despite unrequited love, Snape tried to keep Lily Potter safe from Voldemort.

ROUND CHARACTERS ENGAGE READERS IN YOUR STORY

The more details you share about a character, the more your readers will empathize with him or her. If you keep revealing your character's complexities, you'll intrigue readers enough to care about what happens to them as your story unfolds.

The more believable you write your round character, the more your character can help you portray complicated themes and ideas. Whether you have something to say about society or just humanity in general, use a round character—or several—to help you communicate complex and nuanced ideas.



▶ CHAPTER 4. REAL PEOPLE, REALISTIC CHARACTERS: DIGGING BEYOND LIFE

In this chapter we'll be digging into real life and beyond. As Orson Scott Card explains in *Characters & Viewpoint*:

“[People] turn to fiction in order to know people better than they can ever know them in real life. If your story tells them nothing more about people than they already know, you've let your audience down.”

Words to live by when you're creating characters. Start with real people you know but make it your jumping-off point and then delve deep.

Let's look at what that means.

REAL PEOPLE

We all do it; we base our characters on real people from our lives.

Can you really know another person that deeply, though? Do you know everything your partner, your best friend, or your favorite sibling believes, has experienced, and has suffered?

No. You can guess, and they can try to explain, but some things are beyond communication. Some things need to be experienced to truly be understood. To create a three-dimensional, living, breathing character, you need to understand them and all their complexity, on a far deeper level.

So, start with a real-life person—yourself. **Plumb all your deep, dark places and put yourself in the shoes of your main character.** You are a well of inspiration. Say, for example, your character is in high school. You, too, were in high school, and surely you remember how mean the queen bee girls were and the crush you had on the star football player. Use your memories—the dialogue, what scared you, what thrilled you, and what you saw, smelled, tasted, and touched.

At some point, however, your personal well will run dry, or your personal experiences will veer away from your characters' experiences. So how do you keep creating

characters that are true and believable after you've scavenged every bit of good stuff from your own life?

You imagine what you would do in your character's place.

But (you say), what if your character does something horrible you can't imagine doing yourself? Use similar feelings. If you're writing a character who commits murder, something you could never do, think about a time when you felt intense anger. When you're that angry, revenge sounds so good, doesn't it? But you kept yourself from taking the next step—physical harm. Now imagine how or why your character might not stop themselves.

As a writer, you may want to interview someone to get their perspective. But beware that this may skew your story. If you talk with a murderer, you get the story he or she wants you to hear, the pieces and bits they want to portray, not everything. So again, use real people only as a jumping-off point and then fill in the holes yourself.

WONDER-FULL IDEAS

Writers are full of wonder, right? We want to know why a character does something and then uncover the scars and broken places. **You can use your sense of wonder to create amazing characters.**

Consider how using the “what if” tool can help you. Say you're standing in line at the movie theater, waiting to see the latest blockbuster superhero movie. You notice a young boy who doesn't look old enough to see this PG-13 movie, and you wonder what's his story.

What if his parents don't know he's there? Maybe he told them he was spending the night at a friend's house. Or what if his parents are dead and he's in foster care? What if his foster parents are heroin addicts and have no clue what the children in their care are doing?

That's a little melodramatic. So, what if the boy is actually 13, but tiny for his age? His friends think it's funny to pick him up and cradle him like a baby. He's tired of it and is reaching boiling point. What if the movie he's seeing is Captain America, and the boy identifies with



how the US military rejected Captain America for his small stature? Now the boy plans how he can overcome his physical size like the movie hero does.

Now go deeper. Throw in a twist. Let's say there's a reason the boy's family wants to keep him small. Maybe the mother has Munchausen Syndrome, or the parents are thieves by night and the boy is adept at squeezing his body through security laser beams. Too much melodrama again. Surely you can come up with something better, which leads to the next point.

ANCILLARY CHARACTERS

WHO ELSE MUST BE THERE?

A 13-year-old boy will have people in his life. He has an entire world populated by characters with whom he interacts. Unless he is homeless, we can assume that he must live with an adult of some kind. They might be parents, guardians, a foster family, or someone else.

Are they kind or dangerous? Are they wealthy or struggling to get by? We can assume that he goes to school and so there will be teachers in life. Is there one that looks out for him? Or maybe one that has it in for him? Who must be in his life in order for him to survive?

NEXT, ASK "WHO MIGHT BE THERE?"

Are there neighbors? How do neighbors fit into the story? Maybe the boy lives at the beach and he becomes friends with a tourist. The tourist doesn't speak English, and the boy helps him communicate and get around. Or maybe the tourist has children who are cruel and make fun of the boy, and he resents their presence in his town. Maybe one of the tourist's children is a lovely 13-year-old girl, and the boy falls hard for her.

If he rides the bus to and from school, he must know the bus driver. Maybe it's a mean old woman with a wart on her chin and all the kids call her "Mrs. Warthog." Too simple. Go deeper. Maybe the bus driver is a man who got canned from his corporate job, and took the job in desperation. He understands what it's like to feel belittled and sees himself in the boy. There are certainly others, so keep asking yourself "Who might be there?"

FINALLY, ASK YOURSELF "WHO USED TO BE THERE?"

This helps you get into backstory. For example, let's say the boy had grandparents who have since passed. He was close with his grandfather and learned about life, girls, school, etc. from him. While grandfather is not present in the story, his memory plays a big role in how the boy responds to and behaves in situations.

Or maybe the grandmother never accepted the boy's mother, and her contempt and disregard color the way his parents interact. There's always tension in the home because his mother never feels like she's good enough or accepted.

KEEP ASKING YOURSELF QUESTIONS

Have you ever looked at a picture online or in a magazine or newspaper and immediately thought, "I wonder who lives there? Why do they live there? What are they afraid of? What do they dream about?"

Cull your amazing imagination, add a drop of reality from your own life, and then twist things around and go deeper.

Play with your sense of wonder and let it go wild. You'll get your best characters by asking "what if" and "I wonder."



▶ CHAPTER 5. WRITING CHARACTERS AND MAKING DECISIONS: WHAT KIND OF STORY ARE YOU TELLING?

Orson Scott Card argues that while character-driven novels are *de rigor* today, not all novels require in-depth characterization. I hear you gasp; bear with me.

Let's look at the four types of stories that Card says comprises every novel: "MICE," which stands for **milieu, idea, character, event**.

1 MILIEU

Milieu is a fancy word for your story's world. If **you're writing a story and most of your focus is on world-building, you're writing a milieu story**. Card argues that these types of stories don't need strong characterization because instead of worrying about your character, you want your reader to put him or herself in the character's shoes. Readers who love these types of stories get engrossed in the minute details about the world; they want to read about the food, culture, life forms, architecture, customs and more.

Perhaps the most well-known milieu story is *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Instead of getting deep into characterization, characters are there to function within the story's world. Consider how *The Lord of the Rings* has one dwarf and one elf. Says Card, "had there been more, it would have been nearly impossible to tell them apart, just as few readers can remember the difference between the two generic hobbits Merry and Pippin."

The Lord of the Rings still has some characterization, but its biggest appeal is Middle Earth. The story doesn't end when the characters end their quest; it continues until Middle Earth is no longer. Full-blown characters aren't important to the story. In fact, they may even prevent your reader from imagining himself completely in the character's shoes.

2 IDEA

An **idea story is your basic problem or question offered at the beginning that the main character must uncover by the end**. Consider how a murder mystery unfolds: someone is dead at the beginning of the book and you spend the rest of the story trying to figure out who did it. All of Agatha Christie's mysteries included characters who all have a motive for murder

without going too in-depth about them. The reader spends the entire time trying to figure out which of the cads did the deed.

Another type of story that fits this subset is what Card calls "caper stories." Think about the movie *Ocean's Eleven*. A heist is about to go down. The movie follows the characters' goal to come up with a plan to get it done.

Now think about your favorite detective series. The main character doesn't evolve and change by the end, right? You may understand the protagonist better by the end, but there is no change. It would be too difficult to write a series if the detective had to change with each story. So, your basic detective is a stereotype with a few eccentricities to distinguish him from every other detective. Not much characterization there.

3 CHARACTER

Here is the type of story we're most familiar with these days. The main character is trying to change their role in life throughout the story. **There are three outcomes to a character story: the character finds a new role/life, they return to the way things were or they give up completely.**

Card goes into great detail about the character's "role" in this type of story. He explains that your role in life comprises the various relationships you have with others, with your community and beyond. My roles in life are a mother, wife, friend, writer, feminist, pet rescuer, etc. These roles make my life pretty full and frankly pretty tame. No one would want to write a book about my roles.

Your story comes to life when something in the character's role becomes unbearable. It could be something that just happened or something that's been building for a while. The story starts when it's become unbearable and the character must act.

Obviously for this type of story, you need to go deep into characterization. Readers must believe that the character's role is intolerable and that the change is justified. Give them everything they need to know to understand your protagonist deeply and fully.



4 EVENT

This is a basic cause and result story, with the event the central focus of the story. Something causes your story's world to be out of order. As Card puts it,

“Call it imbalance, injustice, breakdown, evil, decay, disease – and the story is about the effort to restore the old order or establish a new one.”

The journey starts when the characters try to right the world and ends when they either save the world or fail enormously. Consider what this world's disorder may be. It could be something as small as an illicit love affair that can't continue or something as big as aliens invading Earth to destroy it.

Card argues that the Event story is the basic structure for stories from the beginning of time. It is man's way of trying to make sense of things happening around us. Creating order in a story world helps us know how to create order in reality.

Characters in an Event story can be as simple as the actions they do and why they do it. Think of *World War Z* or *The Handmaid's Tale*. In both cases, the world has changed for the worse and the characters are struggling to survive within this new landscape. Readers want details about the change that occurred: who did it affect? How did it happen? What needs to happen to bring back safety? Event stories are usually more focused on what's happening out in the world, rather than what's happening internally to your character, though both perspectives can complement each other.

Many Event stories use romance to underpin the event. Consider recent television series such as *The Affair* or *The Good Wife*. Both start with a major event (an affair) and then the rest of the series is about the fall-out from that event. In your own story, you might choose to go deep into characterization or focus on the results of the Event.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU, THE WRITER

When you decide which kind of story you're telling, your reader will expect certain things to happen. Let's look at a murder mystery. Say in the opening scenes of your book, the main character's spouse is killed. If you're writing an Idea story, the purpose of the book will be to find out whodunnit, right? Your readers will be very upset if, instead of solving the murder, you focus on how the main character learns to live without the spouse. Your reader was expecting an Idea story, and you gave them a Character story instead.

Nothing stops you from using other story types as subplots. Consider our murder mystery: a valid subplot would be how the spouse copes with the death, which could be resolved as the murder is solved.

CHARACTERIZATION AS A STORYTELLING TOOL

Orson Scott Card's point is that characterization is a tool you use to tell your story. If you're writing a detective series, you probably won't get too deep in characterization beyond the stereotypical detective with some eccentricities. It's more about planting clues and leading the reader. But if your story focuses mostly on the characters, not an Event, Idea, or a Milieu, go deep into character building.



▶ CHAPTER 6. ARCHETYPES – NOT STEREOTYPES OR TROPES

ARCHETYPE	The original model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies: a perfect example.
STEREOTYPE	A standardized mental picture that is held in common that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment of a certain group or demographic.
TROPE	A common or overused theme or device; cliché, e.g. the usual horror movie tropes.

Used widely in art, literature and mythology, an **archetype** is a common character that represents the universal patterns of human nature and shapes the structure of a story. Archetypes draw on common threads of human existence that will resonate with a wide range of people. They help your reader understand your character's motives, goals, and fears because they already know their type. You don't have to explain how a man could be an absent, work-focused father because your reader has met this type of man before—they can fill in the blanks.

Stereotyping, in contrast, applies a simplistic set of attributes most commonly associated with a certain group of people, to all members of that group. It reduces people down to a label, dismissing variety within that group, and is often based on prejudice. A stereotype is created from someone's limited view of people.

A **trope** is the character version of a cliché. It's the character you've seen a thousand times before. It's the feisty (often gay, black or some other minority) best friend that gives your protagonist the tough love they need to hear; or it's the haggard cop, about to retire, who gets pulled into one last investigation. The term trope can refer to more than just overdone characters; whole storylines can be tropes. Using a trope isn't necessarily bad—sometimes they can be useful tools, but more often than not they feel lazy and predictable.

The tricky part is using an archetype that feels universal and connects with your readers, without relying on stereotypes or creating tropes. I know. We're not saying it's easy!

Victoria Schmidt put together *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters* to help writers deeply understand their characters and bring them to life. While we don't have time or space to cover all 45 of her examples, this chapter covers the main eight female and eight male archetypes Schmidt presents.

Each archetype can be either a hero or a villain, depending on how they're portrayed. But beware. These archetypes can easily slip into overused tropes and lose impact if you don't put your own spin on them.

HEROINES AND VILLAINS

THE SEDUCTIVE MUSE AND THE FEMME FATALE

A seductive muse as a heroine is a strong woman in control of all her senses. She's a sensual being who lusts for life in all its forms. She's confident of her sexuality and can see simple solutions to life's problems. The seductive muse is not a prostitute or slut; she's a strong woman who loves sex and doesn't care what others think about her. Think about Kim Cattrall's character in the television show *Sex and the City*.

The femme fatale as a villain is the flip side of the seductive muse. She uses her sexuality to control men, trying to get them to do things against their nature and outside of the law. She's jaded and untrusting of all. She thinks her main value is her body, and she uses it to feel powerful over others. The femme fatale manipulates men into doing her dirty work. Perhaps one of the most famous femme fatales on the screen is Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*.



THE AMAZON AND THE GORGON

The Amazon is a feminist who cares more for women's causes than she does her own self. She will even risk her safety to come to the aid of another woman or child. She is close to nature, almost an "earth mother" of sorts. Wonder Woman is an excellent representation of the Amazon, as is Jo in *Little Women*.

The other side of the Amazon is the Gorgon, who will come to the aid of another woman even if she must kill an innocent man to save her. The Gorgon is Medusa, full of rage and fury. And her rage makes her strong; she'll fight to the death, disregarding right and wrong if she feels her cause is just.

THE FATHER'S DAUGHTER AND THE BACKSTABBER

The father's daughter tends to have more in common with men than with other women. She feels she's exceptional compared to most women and allies herself with strong men who can help her get where she's going. She's smart and strategic and is fondly known as "one of the boys." An excellent example of a father's daughter is Demi Moore's character in *G.I. Jane*, who fights to be accepted as good as any man.

The backstabber is a villain who is willing to trample others to get what she wants. She's calculating and is full of wrath if a man takes advantage of her loyalty. She spends her whole life trying to fit in with strong men and her identity can be wrapped up in her career. She's the character who will stab another woman in the back to climb the corporate ladder. Think of Sigourney Weaver's character in *Working Girl*.

THE NURTURER AND THE OVER-CONTROLLING MOTHER

The nurturer doesn't need to have children of her own to fulfill her destiny. It's her sense of duty to others that fuels her. When a nurturer does have children, they become her entire life. This archetype can often be found in the healing and nursing arenas. Those she cares for give her life meaning and purpose. An excellent example of the nurturer is Maria from *The Sound of Music*.

The villainous over-controlling mother, on the other hand, is the woman who kidnaps someone else's baby when she can't have one of her own. The perfect film representation of the over-controlling mother is Annie Wilkes played by Kathy Bates in *Misery*.

THE MATRIARCH AND THE SCORNED WOMAN

The matriarch is in control of the family. She sees to their needs and demands respect in return, but she needs her family as much as they need her. Unlike the nurturer, the matriarch is strong and tough-skinned, and everyone comes to her for advice. Shirley MacLaine plays an excellent example of the matriarch in the movie *Terms of Endearment*.

The scorned woman is the villain who's been abandoned by her family and husband and is full of anger. She embarks on revenge if her husband has an affair and no one in her vicinity is safe. It's usually the other woman's fault, so she'll do anything to salvage her relationship. Nurse Ratched from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is an excellent example of the scorned woman.

THE MYSTIC AND THE BETRAYER

Peace and mysticism surround the mystic, who loves solitude and to be alone with her thoughts. She is calm, quiet and a mystery to those who don't know her well. She can resist the lure of sex and marriage and is proud of her choice to stay single. Diane Keaton plays the title character in *Annie Hall*, a free spirit who is the perfect example of the mystic archetype.

The betrayer is the nice, quiet lady who poisons her husband. Neighbors are in shock because she hides her dark side well. People feel deeply betrayed when they learn what a monster she really is. Consider Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

THE FEMALE MESSIAH AND THE DESTROYER

The female messiah is the way to enlightenment and love, while the male messiah preaches about it. This archetype can combine with other archetypes to help her achieve her goals. Consider how Joan of Arc was a savior to her people. She was also an Amazon archetype in battle.

The villainous side is the destroyer who protects the highest good of all. She is the only woman who would drop the atomic bomb to stop Hitler. The means justify the ends in her mind, and she sees things in black and white. In Arthurian legend, Morgan le Fay is an evil sorceress bent on destruction.



THE MAIDEN AND THE TROUBLED TEEN

The maiden is full of self-confidence and never worries about things. She takes risks and talks others into following her into adventures. She's unconcerned about marriage, kids and responsibility. But she has a big heart. Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the perfect maiden.

Meanwhile the troubled teen is out of control when it comes to partying, sex, drugs and more. She commits everything in excess and is likely to be talked into unprotected sex and end up pregnant. But she refuses to accept responsibility for her actions. Mia Wallace played by Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction* is a great example of the troubled teen.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

THE BUSINESSMAN AND THE TRAITOR

The businessman has a strong, logical mind that is always focused on his work. While he's a great team player and employee, he's an absent husband and father who brings work home with him. He rarely goes on vacation, but he always reaches his goals and sets high standards for himself. Mr. Banks in *Mary Poppins* is the ultimate businessman.

The traitor is perfectly summed up in Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* before he is visited by the three spirits. He's miserly, insists on rules and order, and will go to any lengths to cover up any wrongdoing. He loves having people at his mercy.

THE PROTECTOR AND THE GLADIATOR

The protector lives fully in all his senses. He is very intense in his feelings and enjoys all physical activity. He fiercely protects those he loves and makes others feel special and cared for. His life is full of adventures and risks. The perfect protector example is Bruce Willis as Detective John McClane in the *Die Hard* movies.

On the other hand is the gladiator who is only out for bloodlust and battle. He's driven by the pleasure and power that fighting and destroying brings. He puts others' lives in danger without giving it a second thought. Sonny Corleone in *The Godfather* is the gladiator archetype.

THE RECLUSE AND THE WARLOCK

The recluse is a sensitive man who gets lost in his own thoughts and fantasies. He is a philosopher who loves quiet time reading and analyzing ideas. Hamlet is an excellent example of a recluse who is forced out of his solitary existence by a need for revenge. He even exhibits some warlock tendencies.

The warlock uses magic and mysticism to hurt people or even the environment. He's only out for himself and disregards any effect he has on the earth and the people around him. The warlock avoids social situations and people because he's afraid of rejection, so he has no close relationships. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* shows both a great recluse and warlock character.

THE FOOL AND THE DERELICT

The fool is still a boy deep down inside. He loves to play and never feels inferior to others. People flock to his side because they know he'll find the party after work. He works tirelessly at playing around and having fun. A big house and fancy car aren't necessary; a good time is. *Don Quixote* shows traits of the fool archetype.

The derelict is the con man who is charming and charismatic but takes people in and tricks them. He is irresponsible and gets in trouble with the law often. The derelict causes misery and shame to his family and parents and hates authority figures.

THE WOMAN'S MAN AND THE SEDUCER

The woman's man is captivated by women and genuinely loves them. He considers them his equal and sometimes his better and has more female friends than male. He could care less for the old boys' network, and helps women transform into stronger individuals with high self-esteem. Porthos in Alexander Dumas's *Three Musketeers* is a strong woman's man.

The seducer can be a woman's man who is hurt or betrayed by a woman. He lures women away from their relationships, breaking up their families and leaving them to pick up the pieces when he's done. Count Vronsky in *Anna Karenina* is a seducer.

THE MALE MESSIAH AND THE PUNISHER

Unlike the female messiah, the male messiah preaches and shows the way to enlightenment and love. The male messiah can combine with other archetypes to help him achieve goals, like Mel Gibson's William Wallace character in *Braveheart*. Wallace combined messiah and protector archetypes to save his people by going to war and winning freedom.

The punisher isn't out to gain his own desires; he's more likely to protect the highest good for all. He will curse and punish the "fallen" man to teach him a lesson and to break his ego. In trying to transform someone into his own image, he'll kill the man's spirit.



THE ARTIST AND THE ABUSER

The artist is deeply in touch with his feelings in a world that devalues men for showing emotion. It's acceptable when he channels his feelings into his art, but he can be insecure and angry because anger is the only acceptable emotion for a man to express. He attracts women because he's passionate when making up after a fight. Tristan in Arthurian legend is an artist archetype.

When the artist can't control his feelings, he turns into the abuser, a vindictive and volatile man. He lives for revenge and will hold on until he achieves satisfaction. Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* is an example of the abuser.

THE KING AND THE DICTATOR

The king is like the Godfather or other mafia boss who revels in excess. He is a strong man who can charm people and lead others to victory through his strategist abilities. He knows how to relate to men and motivate them to join his side. He also loves to come to women's aid regardless of his wife's feelings. Captain James T. Kirk in *Star Trek* is an excellent king archetype.

When the need to rule by controlling others goes beyond excessive, the king turns into a dictator. Consider how Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick* becomes obsessed with the whale and starts displaying dictator characteristics like the need to rule and a disregard for the consequences.

USE ARCHETYPES BUT DON'T BE RULED BY THEM

Think of these archetypes as tools. Use the universality of them to build your readers' understanding of your characters, but don't let them hem you in.

Your character might be part nurturer and part seductress. Maybe he is a business man who longs to be an artist. Perhaps he begins as a protector, but devastating events turn him into a gladiator.

If they are to be believable, your characters must feel familiar but unique.



▶ CHAPTER 7. HOW NON-CHRONOLOGICAL WRITING CAN CREATE CHARACTER EMPATHY

Have you ever read a book that jumped around chronologically, but was so well done that you read it in one sitting? Think of *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger or *Truly Madly Guilty* by Liane Moriarty. Both story arcs would have been completely inconsequential—and frankly boring—if they were in chronological order.

Shifting back and forth in time creates suspense.

Your readers can unravel the past and understand the ramifications in the present a little at a time.

It creates a tension that makes your books hard to put down.

You also get a depth of character that withholding certain information brings to your narrative when writing non-chronologically. If you tried to tell the same story in a linear fashion, you would know everything from the beginning, the “why” and the “how” of what happened in the past to create the present situation. It would rob you of suspense in not knowing what happened back then that’s causing your character so much pain or angst.

Showing past and present in alternate chapters, for example, would enable you to develop your characters more fully. Jodi Picoult switches between Sage and Josef’s timelines to great effect in *The Storyteller*.

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW DEPTH OF CHARACTER CAN BE NUANCED

You can show a character’s depth at the same time as you create a compelling story question by strategically bouncing around chronologically. Let’s look at an example.

Imagine a young boy protagonist who is fleeing the scene of an arson. There are dead bodies involved, and the boy has a gas can in his hand. He’s dressed in all black and has vomit on his shoes.

In the next scene, we see a snapshot of earlier that day when the boy argues with the parish priest. He pleads with the priest to release him from his altar boy responsibilities that day.

Next, we come back to the present, and the boy is sitting in the back of a patrol car, throwing up and praying.

You get depth of character by juxtaposing the image of the boy as an arsonist against his altar boy persona. And you want to know more about the fire and the dead bodies, right? But who really is this boy? You might take the next scene back even further in time and show him at a funeral, for instance. It would be another piece of the puzzle comprising events that created the current situation.

If your novel were a movie, it would be easier to show the different timelines. For example, your scenes from the past would include a different clothing style and different settings, with older versions of common elements like vehicles. You could even mark the different timelines with completely different settings, such as making your character’s very first apartment out of college not much more than four walls and the present-day apartment in an upscale, expensive building.

SO HOW DO YOU PULL OFF NON-CHRONOLOGICAL WRITING?

It’s not easy. You would certainly need a spreadsheet, mind map, or outline to track all of your story threads. One thing you have to keep straight as you write scenes is who knows what in the different chronological times.

One suggestion to make it easier is to write your idea as a short story first. It’s much easier to work out in a 2,000-word story how the non-chronological ideas fit together than in a 75,000-word novel.

Another suggestion is to use one point of view. Trying to weave different story lines and alternating POVs in non-chronological order would make anyone’s head explode the first time they tried it.

Finally, just write the story in chronological order. Then write each scene on an index card or print out your manuscript and cut it apart. Reassemble your scenes/manuscript in non-chronological order to build character and go even deeper into your story’s main themes.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STORY

Non-chronological writing can help you increase your story's tension by offering information to your readers that doesn't follow the normal cause-and-effect order.

You only provide the "cause" information of a particular event when your story demands it.

Just because your story doesn't follow a traditional linear narrative is no excuse not to have a clear beginning, middle and end. That is the structure your readers expect, so you must give them that to keep them interested and reading. But you'll enjoy creating an order of events that piques curiosity, heightens internal conflict and creates the best story for your readers.



▶ CHAPTER 8. CRAFTING YOUR ANTI-HERO: THE HOMER SIMPSON EFFECT



Homer Simpson has only one focus in this world: himself. He has some pretty unlikable characteristics. Why do we love to hate Homer and hate to love him so much?

Because he's a well-done anti-hero, that's why.

WHAT'S AN ANTI-HERO?

Remember when protagonists were clearly good, and villains were nasty through and through? Forget those days, because readers prefer a well-rounded character—protagonist and antagonist. Your genial do-gooder dressed in all white versus a dark and brooding villain dressed in all black is no longer enough.

People want protagonists and antagonists who have both dark and light inside—especially when the protagonist isn't always the good guy.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ANTI-HERO AND A HERO?

Heroes are the guys who generally win in the end. They can still be deeply flawed, but they overcome and conquer. They're able to put their own cares and concerns aside when it matters most and help others.

Anti-heroes, however, go against the grain of normal society. They lack morals or just plain human kindness. Anti-heroes can be malicious and pitiful, then turn around and be charming. The key to a real anti-hero is he or she will only do the right thing when it gives them what they want and benefits them somehow. They're only in it for themselves.

EXAMPLES OF ANTI-HEROES

Homer is a great example. He puts himself first in all instances over his family, friends and complete strangers. He constantly throws fits about everything and gets in immense shouting matches with anyone who dares stand up to him. He's often violent and rude, and he delights in the misery of his meek, God-loving neighbor.

Have you ever watched the FX series *Dexter*? Now there's a serious anti-hero. Blood splatter expert by day—serial killer by night. He's a complex, morally ambiguous character who stalks and slays other killers. Yet somehow, the writers keep us on his side. Despite themselves, viewers find themselves cheering for Dexter and hoping that he will be able to outsmart the cops that are after him.

Homer and Dexter are great examples of well-written anti-heroes because we can see a little bit of ourselves in their character flaws. **For every awful act, there is a glimpse of love and humanity.** Our compassion (and great scriptwriting) helps us understand how and why he is the way he is, and it allows us to forgive him.

HOW TO CREATE THE PERFECT ANTI-HERO

Anti-heroes don't just have major faults they can overcome. There's a quality that evokes pity, maybe a little psychosis involved, and usually their self-concept is blown way out of proportion. When creating an anti-hero, consider these character traits to help flesh them out.

ANTI-HEROES ARE:

- **Not good role models.** You wouldn't want your children to look up to them or model their behavior after them.
- **Pretty selfish.** Sometimes they can display good traits, but usually only when it benefits them somehow.
- **Motivated by self-interest.** Anti-heroes will do whatever it takes—even crossing the line into immorality.
- **Motivated by conflicting emotions.** They can focus solely on revenge, then suddenly they're doing something honorable.

One caveat: your anti-hero doesn't have to be redeemed at the end of your novel or story. Anti-heroes may show a streak of compassion and caring, but they're still damaged people at the end.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Watch *American Horror Story*, Season 3 “Coven” for some excellent anti-heroes. You get witches, voodoo and racism. These are some seriously evil people, but we see them in a sympathetic light because of masterful character creation on the writers’ part. Two others to watch are *Breaking Bad* and *Deadpool I and II*, God love Ryan Reynolds.

I always thought I was a few cards short of a full deck when I “feel” for the anti-hero. They’re terrible people, right? But when they’re really well-done, I find them more compelling than a traditional protagonist.

Anti-heroes—the heroes we don’t want to become engaged with but can’t help ourselves!



▶ CHAPTER 9. FIVE TRICKS FOR USING DIALOGUE TO WRITE TRULY CAPTIVATING CHARACTERS

Dialogue can be about much more than just the words on the page. Good authors use it to build tension and subtly set the tone of each interaction.

The words your characters choose say so much more than just their lexical meaning. So how can you use dialogue to create captivating characters and move your story forward?

In this chapter, we'll teach you five tricks to bring your characters' words to life.

1 CREATE POWER DYNAMICS

Dialogue is one of the best ways to create power dynamics between your characters. When one character is using aggressive language and the other is backing down, it's easy to get a sense of the relationship. A passive-aggressive comment is an effective way to get across dislike or distrust. Or, having one character using a formal name while the other uses an informal name is a subtle way of letting your reader know who holds the power in that relationship.

"Did you hear me, Tony?"

"Yes, Mrs Montgomery."

Your readers will be able to learn a lot from your dialogue based on the choice of language you employ. Is it dismissive, aggressive or timid? Are they words that you would use when you are feeling comfortable or feeling awkward? Are they demanding words or appealing words? Does one character interrupt or speak over the other?

All of these give your readers clues about the power dynamic between your characters and help them to read between your lines.

2 INDICATE SOCIAL OR GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

So many stories are dependent on readers getting a clear understanding of the class differences between their characters. Using linguistics is one way to get those differences across. Writers must be careful not to fall into negative stereotypes, but the reality is that a kid who grew up in a dysfunctional poverty-stricken

Detroit family will speak differently than a kid who grew up in a dysfunctional wealthy Connecticut family.

Don't overplay this. Not every word needs to be phonetic or it will sound like a caricature and distract from the content, but a few dialect words here and there keep the character's background at the front of your reader's mind.

Likewise, if one of your characters is meant to be from England, then their dialogue should reflect the way that British people speak. Again, be careful here. Not all Brits actually say things like "Core blimey, Guvner, I'm knackered!" but they will call the trunk of the car "the boot" and refer to their cell phones as "mobile" phones. Your writing should reflect these differences if it is to feel real.

3 ILLUSTRATE DECEPTION OR MANIPULATION

I love it when I have insider knowledge about a character's inner workings and they conflict with what he or she says or does. When you know that the man luring the woman to his home is a serial killer, but all she hears is "Would you like to come back to my place and have a look at those photos I was telling you about?", it gives you a thrill. You want to step into the story and yell "Don't go! He's not really a photographer!"

In life, we all manipulate and deceive at some level (though usually not in such a murderous way!). If the reader knows that Jim doesn't want to go to the party for fear of seeing his ex, but calls and says that the babysitter cancelled, then the reader is in on the deception.

A good writer will be able to persuade their reader that this deception is good or bad, depending on where they want the story to go.

Should we feel sorry for Jim for being too anxious? Or should we feel angry at him for telling the lie? Either way, the reader has seen through the facade and learned something about Jim's agenda and his vulnerability.



4 INDICATE SARCASM OR INNUENDO

Having your dialogue contrast with your description is a great way to indicate a second meaning to your reader.

- She rolled her eyes and picked up her wallet. “Fine then, let’s go. This should be a barrel of laughs.”
- One eyebrow lifted and a smarmy smile crossed his face. “Oh yeah, baby, I’ll load your dishwasher all right!”

Sarcasm is useful in dialogue; it can illustrate either a joke or an insult. It is frequently used when speaking but much more difficult to get across on the page, yet it can add a level of realism to your writing that will engage your reader.

5 GIVE CLUES OR HIDDEN AGENDAS

Dialogue is a great way to foreshadow. If a conversation is about searching for a lost child and you plant a small, seemingly irrelevant seed that a certain character might have a different reason for wanting to find the child, your reader will remember it and feel on the inside track when you reveal the reason. If your male sales clerk states that he has never been to a certain bar in Chapter 3, but it’s revealed in Chapter 7 that he used to work there, that tells the reader he is not trustworthy. Perhaps your female grad student character is avoiding questions (or, conversely, she is asking too many questions) and steering dialogue in a certain direction. These puzzle pieces will be stored away by your reader until eventually a picture is formed in their mind’s eye.

Writing dialogue is a difficult skill to master. It must be extensive enough to allow your characters to engage with one another in a way that feels real and allows for relationships to form but is limited enough that the reader won’t get bored.

In real life, dialogue includes a great deal of tedious fluff: “Did you wash the salad for dinner?”, “I can’t seem to find my glasses”, “I think I’ve seen this episode of *Wheel of Fortune* before.” **On the page, dialogue must only be included if it is moving your story forward in some way.** If you are setting the scene as a mundane night at home, then including a dull chat about a TV show might be ideal and help the reader understand the relationship’s dynamic. Otherwise, cut the humdrum chatter of life and use dialogue with purpose.

With these five tricks up your sleeve, you can craft realistic conversations that enhance your plot and deepen the reader’s connection with your characters. Bring dialogue to life and the rest will follow.



▶ CHAPTER 10. THE NITTY GRITTY PRACTICAL GUIDE TO GIVING YOUR CHARACTERS UNIQUE VOICE

GUEST AUTHOR: KATJA KAINE, CREATOR OF [THE NOVEL FACTORY](#)

Character voice is as difficult to pin down as it is critical. Plenty of writing advice resources talk about the importance of your main characters each having a unique voice, but how do you achieve that?

The main problem is that all of those characters are essentially coming from the same mind – yours – so you need to find ways to ensure your personal characteristics, speech patterns and nuances don't all bleed into your characters.

Building on the work from the opening chapters, it's time to ask these ten further questions about your characters. These questions are designed to help break you out of your own voice patterns, ensuring every sentence they say reflects their own personality and nuances.

If you spend enough time creating individual voices for each character, a reader should be able to identify which character is speaking from any isolated sentence they say.

1 WHAT IS THE CHARACTER'S FAVORED VOCABULARY?

Does the character have a small or large vocabulary? Do they overuse certain words? Do they tend to use short, succinct words or long, overwrought ones? Do they use a lot of words relating to a particular sense, such as sight or sound? Do they use a lot of words relating to their job or hobby?

2 WHAT ARE THEIR SPEECH PATTERNS, QUIRKS AND HABITS?

Are their sentences long or short? Do they use a lot of questions, or imperative statements? Do they frequently start or end a sentence with a particular word, phrase, or tic, such as: "Like," "you know what I mean?" or a giggle?

3 WHAT IS THEIR EDUCATIONAL LEVEL?

Their educational level will affect their speech. More education may mean a more advanced vocabulary or "proper" language. Or less formal education could result in pomposity of speech to try to hide their class. Likewise, an upper-class person may affect more slang to fit in with more "normal" people.

4 WHAT ARE THEIR RACIAL/CULTURAL/REGIONAL INFLUENCES?

While you'll want to be careful with this not to rely too heavily on flimsy stereotypes that might be weak or offensive, where we are born and where we grow up greatly affects our speech and culture. Regional influences can affect a character's vocabulary, word order, slang, accent, attitude and priorities.

5 WHAT SLANG DO THEY USE?

Does your character use a particular kind of slang or jargon? Do they do it to build rapport or to make others feel excluded? Is it related to their job, role, age, culture or something else?

6 DO THEY GET TO THE POINT OR RAMBLE?

Some people waste no time in getting to the point, and use the most concise, unambiguous language possible. Others beat around the bush until you have no idea what they are trying to say. Wherever your character lands on this scale, consider why they behave like this. Is it deliberate or unconscious? Is it a defense mechanism based on childhood experience or directly related to their current situation?

7 ARE THEY ASSERTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Is the character naturally assertive or passive? Are they forceful and confrontational, or do they shy away from conflict? This will come through in their choice of not only what to say, but also how they say it.



8 ARE THEY PROACTIVE, TAKING CHARGE? OR DO THEY PREFER TO REACT AND FOLLOW?

Your character could land anywhere on the scale from being decisive and charismatic, expecting everyone to naturally fall in behind them, through sitting around waiting for someone to take charge, all the way to actively obstructing anyone who does try to get something done. Does their attitude manifest in a sensitive, accommodating way, or is it stubborn and unyielding?

9 SENSE OF HUMOR

What sort of sense of humor does your character have? Do they laugh at other people's misfortune? Or their own jokes? Do they titter delicately at highbrow wit, or do they slap their thigh and collapse uncontrollably at fart jokes? Do they mutter sarcastic comments just loud enough for those around them to hear, or do they enjoy making others laugh with self-deprecating humor?

10 METAPHOR PREFERENCES

What topics are the theme of their metaphors? Do they use a lot of idioms about war, football or a particular sense? What is their profession, background or hobby? Can these be reflected in their metaphorical speech?

HOW TO USE THESE QUESTIONS

Work your way through the list for each main character. If you don't know the answers to any of the questions, take time to step back and get to know your character that bit better, making sure their motivations and backstory check out.

Lay this groundwork and you'll find that when you next bring your characters together for a scene, their dialogue will be easier to write. It will sound more natural and distinctive, because you'll be channeling their distinctive voices rather than adjusting your own.



▶ CHAPTER 11. WHY YOU SHOULD THROW YOUR MAIN CHARACTER UNDER A BUS

That heading made you flinch, right? In this chapter, we're going to look at how your characters fit into your story and challenge you to overturn your assumptions, all for a very good reason.

What is it about a great story that keeps you turning the pages?

Think of the last book you devoured in one sitting. What kept you so engrossed you had to stay up until 4am to finish it? For those of us who sit bleary-eyed in front of the computer because we couldn't put a good book down last night, we stumbled across an author who knows how to raise the stakes.

And the higher the stakes, the better—am I right?

Let's dissect what makes for great story stakes, how can you tell if they're high enough, and what you can do to make them soar.

WHAT ARE STORY STAKES?

To keep readers engaged and engrossed in your story, you need to grab their attention and keep it on every page. It's not enough to write interesting characters or a fantastic plot. Winning—or losing—must be tied to something **BIG** at stake by the story's end.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What will your main character gain at the end if she wins the conflict?
2. What is the worst thing that could happen if he loses?
3. What does your protagonist need to get or achieve and what's holding her back from doing it?
4. What will your main character risk to get or achieve what he needs and what is he willing to sacrifice?

AN EXAMPLE OF HIGH STAKES

Let's look at my favorite high-stakes book, *The Martian* by Andy Weir. What Weir does incredibly well is make the central conflict have personal high stakes for all characters involved.

The premise of the conflict is the crew makes an emergency take-off and leaves Mark Watney behind

on Mars, assuming he's dead. The answers to our four questions are:

1. **Mark Watney needs to figure out how to survive on Mars until someone realizes he's alive and can rescue him.**
2. **If he loses (i.e. doesn't figure out how to survive), he dies.**
3. **There are a multitude of mini and major problems Watney needs to overcome to survive. He sometimes loses hope he can keep himself alive.**
4. **Watney risks certain death several times when using dangerous means to help him reach his end goal.**

To avoid too many spoilers, the above answers are fairly cryptic, but you can get a feel for the stakes. They're pretty high.

But where the genius comes in is the supporting characters.

Everyone has a personal stake in getting Watney rescued. His crew mates are devastated to realize he's been left behind. They feel responsible, but it's impossible for them to turn around to rescue him. Members of NASA are facing personal and professional failure as they try to figure out how to reach Watney before he runs out of food and water. And no one can forget that one man's life hangs in the balance of every decision they make.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOUR STAKES AREN'T HIGH ENOUGH?

Sometimes you know when the stakes aren't high enough because you're just not worried enough about getting your characters out of conflict. If you're not sure, though, here are a few more questions to help you nail down your stakes:

- What happens if your main character fails to reach his goal?
- Is your protagonist personally invested in the outcome of your story's central conflict?
- What happens to the world and others around the main character if she fails?
- Does your character reach a defining moment? Will he be changed forever?



Your answers to these questions should help you realize fairly quickly if your stakes are too low.

If nothing important is happening or you don't have massive consequences for your main character's actions, you need to raise the stakes.

HOW TO RAISE THE STAKES

The best way to raise the stakes is to play the "what if" game. And my personal favorite is:

What if I throw my main character under a bus?

It changes the dynamic of any conflict when your main character is hit by a bus. Other writers like to put a gun in someone's hand and see what happens. Obviously, you can't have your main characters in every story get hit by a bus; people would stop reading your work.

But you can ask, "what's the worst thing that could happen right now?" and then make it happen!

If you haven't yet read *The Martian*, do so to see worst-case scenario in action. Or, if sci-fi isn't your style, watch Season 3 of *Downton Abbey* for an utterly shocking main character's death.

Sometimes you need to go to extremes to raise the stakes. The key is to realize things should not merely **happen to** your characters. You don't want random disasters or catastrophes to strike your main character to show how brave, kind, or strong she is. You want to build on the power of cause and effect. This lets you deepen your themes and really explore your characters.

One solution is characters who somehow **cause** bad things to happen. If he can be responsible in some way for the bad thing happening, you have an opportunity to explore motivations and reactions that will bring a wonderful depth to your plot.

Let's say your main character is the type to run away from his problems. He has a horrible fight with his love interest on the sidewalk in front of their flat and physically runs away into the path of an oncoming bus. He's responsible for causing this calamity on several different levels.

When your character isn't responsible, and bad things keep happening, you've merely victimized your main character. This will not raise the stakes. It just makes him a poor schmuck.

DON'T BE TOO NICE

We all love our main characters, but we need them to hurt badly. It's OK—even encouraged—to not play nicely with your characters. If you can lay the responsibility for the bad things happening squarely on his or her shoulders, you're definitely raising the stakes, and you can get much deeper into your main character's psyche.



▶ CHAPTER 12. HAVE YOU WRITTEN YOUR STORY'S "MIRROR MOMENT" YET?

If you haven't read James Scott Bell's books on writing, you're missing out on some great information. The first book of his I read was *Plot & Structure*, and it set me on the right path.

I recently came across a relatively new book of his titled *Write Your Novel From the Middle* that lays out an interesting premise about something Bell calls the "mirror moment." Bell's theory is that there is a single moment in the middle of the story where the main character takes a "long, hard look at himself (as in a mirror). He asks, Who am I? What have I become? Who am I supposed to be?"

Bell says if you can nail that moment, everything that comes before and after it will have more depth and resonance. Let's test his theory.

(Spoiler alert: we discuss endings below, so skip past any of the books that are still on your to-read list. Better yet, go read them and then continue the chapter!)

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

About halfway through this exquisite book, a group of men show up in the Finches' front yard demanding to see Atticus. Jem presses his face against the glass in the living room to hear what's being said.

The group is concerned about Tom Robinson being held in the town jail, afraid certain people will protest. They're trying to convince Atticus to do something so there won't be any violence. The crowd comprises prominent men in town who don't understand why Atticus is putting his reputation on the line for Robinson.

They beg him, "You've got everything to lose from this, Atticus." His response is pure Atticus Finch. "Do you really think so?"

Scout says that's her father's "dangerous question." It's his go-to response before he takes someone down a peg for being short-sighted or narrow-minded.

Here, the reader sees Atticus Finch in the mirror, an honorable man willing to stand up for what he believes in. He's more concerned that the truth comes out at the trial than he is in what happens to his good name.

We see Atticus's reflection in the mirror and know that the rest of the book will be him proving to everyone else how narrow-minded and wrong they can be.

ANNA KARENINA

Towards the end of Part 4 in Chapter XVII is the middle of the book (there are eight parts total). It's the scene where Anna Karenina is in confinement having given birth to her lover's child and is suffering from a fever the doctor feels will lead to her death.

Anna sent a telegram to Karenin begging him to come and forgive her on her deathbed. The scene unfolds with the two men, husband and lover, coming to terms and shaking hands, Karenin forgiving Anna and having a true change of heart about her.

It's the turning point in the novel. It's the moment when the two different men look at themselves in the mirror and decide what they want for the future. Karenin is honorable; Vronsky is not, and even attempts suicide. Anna recovers from her fever but sets out on a wild course that will eventually end in her death.

In the case of Anna Karenina, the mirror moment holds true.

THE GREAT GATSBY

Again at roughly the halfway point of the novel, the mirror moment strikes.

Jordan and Nick are together, and she's explaining to him how Daisy knew Gatsby from a time before and how serious she'd been about him. But Daisy's family intervened, and she ended up marrying Tom, while Gatsby left for the service. It isn't until later that Daisy realizes the man in West Egg hosting the fantastic parties is the same sailor she fell in love with.

The crux of the matter comes down to Gatsby asking Jordan to intervene with Nick to invite Daisy over to Nick's house. Then Gatsby can drop in and see Daisy without her knowing it's been staged. This is when everything Gatsby has been working towards is put into motion. And it will be his downfall.



YOUR OWN STORY'S MIRROR MOMENT

Let me leave you with the wise words of James Scott Bell:

“If you are intentional about what this moment is in your own book, it will illuminate everything for you. The writing will be more unified and organic. If you’re a pantsier, you’ll be guided on what to pants next. If you’re an outliner, it will help you revise your outline.”

If you’re ready to write your story’s mirror moment, you can [read Bell’s full article here](#). If your characters aren’t quite there yet, take a look at our next chapter and dig deeper into their psychology, until you know what they’ll see when they look in the mirror.



▶ CHAPTER 13. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTER

Psychologists have found that people can be identified by eight major psychological segments. These segments define who you are at a basic level. And writers use them to figure out who their character is at the beginning of a story and who they'll be by the end.

As a writer, you need to learn how to mine the eight segments to help you create a character arc that moves and changes by story's end.

Each segment contains two ends that are mirror opposites with a broad spectrum in the middle where characters can fall. Let's look at a handy chart to visualize what this might look like:



At the beginning of your story, your protagonist lies somewhere in between these polar opposites for each segment. **Your character arc is the movement your main characters make between these two points from the beginning to the end.** It's a sliding scale that forces your protagonist to morph into someone new or to believe something different as a result of the pressures and conflict in your story.

HOW YOUR PROTAGONIST'S PSYCHE EVOLVES IS KEY

The **American Film Institute** ranked the top 50 greatest heroes and villains of all time:

- **#1 Greatest villain is Hannibal Lector**
- **#1 Greatest hero is Atticus Finch**

Those two guys are pretty much polar opposites. That's what makes each one so great in his category. Your protagonist and antagonist don't need to be polar opposites for your story to work, however. What's important is that conflict happens to change your protagonist from who he is at the beginning to who he becomes by the end. Rarely will your antagonist change fundamentally who he is from start to finish.

Now let's take a look at *The Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris and see how the protagonist Clarice Starling evolves through each psychological segment.

- **Emotion:** Clarice falls more in the middle of the spectrum at the beginning, but by the end, she is clearly a tough guy.
- **Life skills:** She's pretty much a team player. Clarice is all about the FBI and following the rules. But by movie's end, she's leaning more towards a rebel, wouldn't you say?
- **Creativity:** Clarice is definitely an achiever or a doer rather than a dreamer. This part of her psychological makeup doesn't change much.
- **Intellect:** Another segment that doesn't change over the course, Clarice is intelligent and perhaps even more so by movie's end.
- **Social:** Would you say Clarice is more of a wallflower at the beginning of the movie? But by the end, she can command a room.



- **Work ethic:** Always a dedicated FBI agent, Clarice gets things done. There's not a lazy bone in her body, and this doesn't change.
- **Morality:** This perhaps sees the biggest change in Clarice from beginning to end. She goes somewhat rogue at the end and slides more towards the bad end of the scale as she sees fit to catch the bad guy.
- **Spirituality:** As a result of Clarice's morality taking a hit, she becomes more of a doubter than a believer by movie's end.

USING PSYCHOLOGY ON YOUR CHARACTERS

In psychology, conflict is characterized by two responses: you can either approach or avoid conflict. Those two responses are basic to everything. You either want something (approach) or you fear something (avoid); it's part of everything you do and want in life.

So, your main characters have two choices, basically, with every situation you put them in. They can choose either to do it or avoid it.

Create conflict by alternating and accelerating which response is strongest: a plus (approach) or a minus (avoidance).

Pluses are situations that look better than minuses. Readers are drawn more strongly towards pluses because of how strongly your protagonist wants them. Minuses rear their heads the closer your main character gets to the action. This creates conflict that goes on until your protagonist solves it or someone else does.

How should you handle pluses and minuses? Make the decision that would get your protagonist in the most trouble—if you can.

Fears (minuses) and wants (pluses) can and should change from scene to scene. But there should be clear overarching fears and wants that drive your characters to change over the course of your story. Fear is usually a better motivator than want. People will put their wants aside if their fear is great enough.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR ANTAGONIST?

Change can happen to both protagonist and antagonist, but antagonists rarely change fundamentally by the end. They may move slightly on the scale on a given psychological segment, but rarely do they perform an about-face.

Consider how your antagonist has a story, too. His point of view is righteous. He has a motive and both fear and desire move him toward resolution.

You need to show this same push and pull for your antagonist to really bring your reader in and make them care deeply about the resolution.

You do that through dialogue, action and thoughts. Each shows your reader a part of who your main characters are, what they're doing, and the decisions they make to resolve their conflict. Because both your antagonist and your protagonist need to resolve conflict by your story's denouement.

NEXT STEPS

This quick look at the psychology of character feeds perfectly into the next chapter, which is all about character traits. We'll take a closer look at how your protagonist's personality is fairly set in stone, but their character can change by the end of your story.



▶ CHAPTER 14. THE CHARACTER TRAITS TOOLBOX

Writers sometimes become armchair psychologists. We study the human psyche to try to understand how and why people (especially our protagonists and antagonists) behave the way they do. This chapter will help make sure you've got all your characters' traits at your fingertips.

WHAT ARE CHARACTER TRAITS?

The more you know and understand character traits—both positive and negative—the more believable and relatable your characters will be.

First, let's look at the difference between your characters' inherent personalities and their overlaying character traits.

“Personality is easy to read, and we're all experts at it. We judge people [as] funny, extroverted, energetic, optimistic, confident—as well as overly serious, lazy, negative, and shy—if not upon first meeting them, then shortly thereafter. And though we may need more than one interaction to confirm the presence of these sorts of traits, by the time we decide they are, in fact, present we've usually amassed enough data to justify our conclusions.

Character, on the other hand, takes far longer to puzzle out. It includes traits that reveal themselves only in specific—and often uncommon—circumstances, traits like honesty, virtue, and kindness.”

Lickerman, 2011, PositivePsychologyProgram.com

You're born with a personality. It's a result of genetics to some extent and pretty much unshakable. But character traits are built and can be changed. Your character's traits are shaped by his or her beliefs, some of which come from the environment they grew up in and others that they learned as they grew older and experienced more.

Picking up on our example from the previous chapter, Clarence Starling's work ethic and practical nature are inherent to her personality, but her beliefs and social skills change as she experiences, interacts with and learns from the story's events.

CHARACTER TRAITS ARE CHANGEABLE

Have you ever changed your stance on something big?

Your characters can have a change in perspective after experiencing something striking, meaningful or harrowing. When your character's perspective about something important in life is shaken, it can change their world view.

Evolution means humans adapt to new surroundings or environments, changing their character as times change over the decades. For example, compare attitudes in Victorian England to the 21st century: big differences, right? And the character traits you had as a young teenager have been reshaped and adjusted to create the person you are today. (Thank heavens, because who wants to be their 13-year-old self again?)

Maybe your protagonist was a shy, shrinking violet at the beginning of your story, but circumstances forced him to adapt and evolve into a warrior by the end. This is your character arc, the sweeping changes he needs to make to reflect his new values and beliefs.

Readers expect protagonists to change or grow by the end of the story.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE YOUR PROTAGONIST'S CHARACTER TRAITS?

Character traits help you describe your protagonist's beliefs and attitudes toward work, family, life, friends and community. Your protagonist—and even your antagonist to some degree—will be a mix of positive and negative traits. Everyone's traits fall somewhere on the spectrum between positive and negative. Your job is to determine where your main character lies on the spectrum.



As we've touched upon earlier, both your protagonist and antagonist need to have strengths (positive character traits) as well as weaknesses (negative character traits). **What separates the two types of characters is that your protagonist usually overcomes her weaknesses while the antagonist fails because of a weakness in character.**

BUILDING YOUR TOOLBOX

The best way to write fascinatingly deep characters is to have a PhD in psychology or psychiatry. Barring that, we need resources to learn more about character traits and how they determine our characters' outlook on life and drive their behaviors and beliefs. Here are some key tools:

ONE STOP FOR WRITERS

If you're a newbie and need lists to help you figure out your characters, this website has a Positive Trait Thesaurus and a Negative Trait Thesaurus with scads of traits from which to choose. In addition, each thesaurus comes with an in-depth discussion or tutorial to help you decide what character traits to use.

QUIZ: WHAT ARE YOUR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS?

This site has a nifty quiz you can take to determine your positive and negative traits. If you're trying to figure out your main characters, answer the quiz questions as your protagonist and antagonist would, not as yourself—unless you want to do a little soul-searching.

THERAPIST AID

Here's a neat little sheet of positive traits that therapists use to help their patients feel better about themselves and build some self-esteem. The site is a treasure trove of other resources to help you understand your characters better. For instance, they have a worksheet you might want to fill out for each character: My Strengths and Qualities.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS WORKSHEETS

The Florida Center for Reading Research has created a nifty tool. Teachers use this tool to help students understand characters better, but writers can benefit from it, too. Tons of worksheets help you sift through the various character traits and figure out where on the spectrum your characters fall. By the time you've filled this packet out on your main characters, you'll know them inside and out and exactly how you want them to change.



▶ CHAPTER 15. PLOT VS. CHARACTER

In this chapter, we'll explore how plot and character arcs intertwine to create a deeply nuanced internal and external journey for your characters.

Consider your plot like the stage upon which you display your characters working out their inner journeys and dealing with external circumstances and conflicts. Use it to amplify the themes your protagonist explores in your story.

Your plot should give your characters an infrastructure on which to unfurl their internal conflicts and a hint to help you explain their decisions.

WHERE TO START?

Since this book is about characters, start with your protagonist. In working through the previous chapters, by now you should have a fully-formed main character replete with an inner journey just waiting to be drawn out. Let's start with him or her.

What kind of story do you see him or her cavorting in? Would she be best in a crime drama where she hunts down a killer? Or maybe he might be perfect for a Sci-Fi adventure dealing with alien beings who want to take over earth. Better yet, close your eyes and dream about the best possible story you'd love to tell. Disregard your characters for a moment. What would be the most insanely perfect book you'd like to write?

Now how can you marry those two ideas together? Take what you think your main character would be best at and combine it with your dream story. That's the kernel of an idea you can start with.

What ideas come to mind as you think about your character's internal journey married with the story kernel you came up with? Capture them all.

CHOOSING A GENRE

If you write genre fiction, the genre you choose will have an impact on your character arc. Because genres must have certain elements, this will shape how your protagonist changes from the beginning of your book to its climax. Each genre has certain conventions you must follow and reader expectations you must meet.

Let's say your main character has unresolved issues with his father; he's afraid of incurring his father's wrath by making the wrong decision. You'll need to marry that inner journey to the conventions of your genre. For example, you pick a spy thriller. There must be a clash at the climax between the protagonist and the antagonist, right? Can the antagonist somehow remind your protagonist of his father? How about a mentor your protagonist looks up to turns out to be the spy? How will your main character resolve his decision to capture his mentor, thus incurring the father's wrath and thwarting his inner journey?

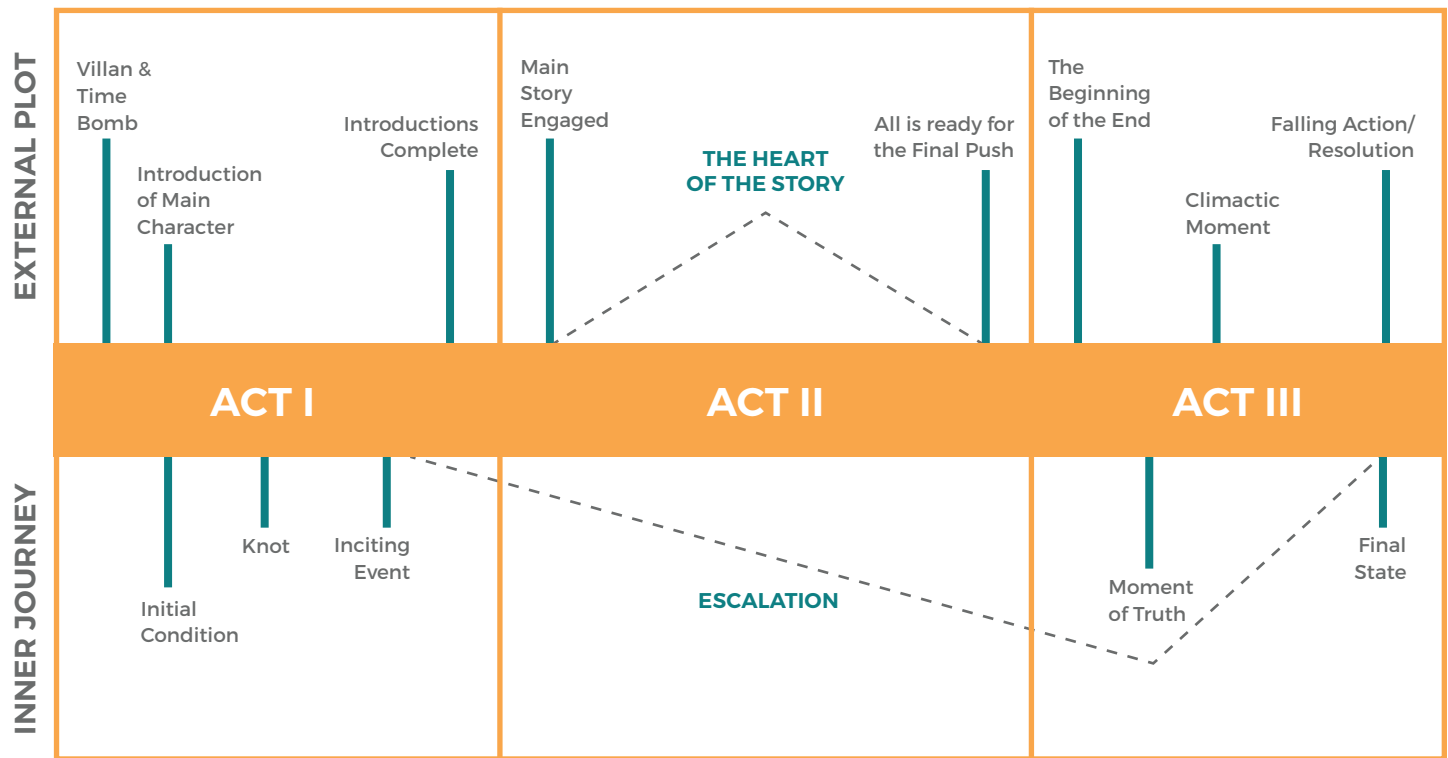
Before selecting which genre you want your story set in, consider the ramifications it will have on your character's inner journey. Some genres may resonate more because of what you know about your protagonist's inner conflicts.

FOLLOWING A SOLID THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

Consider your story on a line with the protagonist's inner journey coming to light at the same time the external plot is unfolding. Let's look at a visual aid (next page):



INTEGRATING PLOT AND CHARACTER:



The horizontal line shows the three acts of your story. The line underneath is your protagonist's internal journey, and the line above is the external one. See how each journey unfolds in specific spots along the classic three-act story structure?

Rather than focusing mainly on characterization or only on plot, your novel must include both an inner journey and an external one. You want your protagonist to change or learn or grow by book's end, thus revealing a satisfying internal journey across three acts. At the same time, you want an attention-getting plot to move the action forward and keep readers engaged.

Some "experts" feel character-driven novels are true literature and plot-driven genre stories are not. The truth is everyone likes great, three-dimensional characters and loves a rousing plot.

It's the marriage of character and plot that creates something that resonates with everyone.

RESIST FORMULAIC FICTION

Formulaic fiction is chock-full of character stereotypes and overused, recurring plot devices. Rather than write something formulaic, consider this section a foundation on which you can build something new.

Consider how houses in subdivisions can be carbon copies of one another. These are usually the result of someone trying to make the most money on the least bit of effort. But a master builder looks at the same plot of land and the same foundation and sees a different house built there, each one being distinct from the rest.

Now consider your favorite book. Analyze it. See how it fits on the three-act foundation with inner and external journeys, but the author brought his or her own twist and made the result something completely different.

Actually, analyze each book you read to see where the author decided how and when to follow the "rules" and when to bend them to suit their own needs. Your plot and characters will be unique, and so might your means of bringing everything together.



▶ CHAPTER 16. WHY EVERY HEROINE DOES NOT NEED A LOVE INTEREST

“Some Day My Prince Will Come”—who doesn’t remember singing that song as a little girl? Poor Snow White. She needed a man to come breathe life into her. And she is not the only one!

- **Sleeping Beauty** and **Cinderella** both waited around until a prince came and rescued them.
- **Belle** fell in love with the Beast even though he kept her prisoner in his castle.
- In *The Princess and the Frog*, **Tiana** falls in love with Prince Naveen despite the fact that he is cocky, spoiled and arrogant.
- *Brave*’s **Merida** was a little better, but her storyline still revolved around her marriageability to her various unimpressive suiters.
- **Elsa** in *Frozen* didn’t have a love-interest, but Disney made up for that by having her sister **Anna** wooed by both Hans and Kristoff. (Funny, but in the merchandise stakes Elsa outsold Anna.)
- In *The Little Mermaid*, **Ariel** is ready to give up everything, including her own voice, for a man she glimpsed just once, for goodness’ sake!

What messages are we sending to our little girls?

And then came **Moana**. Phew!

If you haven’t seen the movie, Moana is a 16-year-old Polynesian girl and the future leader of her village. When danger threatens her island, she goes out on a quest to save her people. She teams up with a burly demi-god along the way, but in the end, she is the one who saves her people. A strong woman on a hero’s journey.

And even more shocking: Moana didn’t have a love interest. I’m sure that Disney was tempted to include a handsome villager flirting coyly from behind his palm tree, who may or may not kiss her when she returns, but they didn’t. They let Moana’s story be about her journey.

WHERE ARE OUR ROLE MODELS?

It’s not just Disney. There are very few authors writing female characters that don’t depend on a romance subplot to carry the book.

This isn’t to say that there isn’t a wonderful place for romance in literature—who doesn’t love a great romance? **The problem is that female characters are nearly always driven by romance, whereas their male counterparts tend to be much more varied and complex in their motivations.**

In 1949, Joseph Campbell famously wrote about his revolutionary *“Hero’s Journey,”* a narrative framework that has formed the background for countless stories. It’s incredibly insightful, marrying modern psychology with traditional storytelling practices.

The problem, however, is that it doesn’t work well for a female protagonist. Campbell did not see women as having the capacity to have their own stories. In his view, women had small roles in society, rarely wielded political power, and were wives and mothers, seductresses and villains, lovers and conquests—but rarely the celebrated victors.

In fact, of the seventeen stages Campbell describes, only two refer to women:

THE MEETING WITH THE GODDESS

This is the stage where the hero discovers a powerful love, either a true-love soulmate or a divine maternal metaphor. These female roles aren’t partners, allies or equals, but someone to be honored or protected, even idolized on a pedestal.

WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS

The hero faces a powerful temptation that threatens to divert him from his path towards his destiny. Campbell uses a female as the tempter because so many classic stories have a male protagonist who can barely contain his lust.

So yeah, according to Campbell, women can be Goddesses or Temptresses. That’s it. Putting too much importance on this frankly misogynistic model only reinforces the sexist limitations we see in current film and literature.

Thankfully, many writers have shed the shackles of Campbell’s limited view. Susanne Collins’ *Hunger*



Games Trilogy is a great example of a strong female protagonist following the Hero's Journey.

One editor on **Goodreads** put together a list of [*"Fiction/Novels with Female Protagonist That Aren't About Love or Romance"*](#). Granted, there are only a couple hundred books on the list, but we have to start somewhere.

LET'S CREATE A HEROINE'S JOURNEY

We need a strong female heroine who experiences a mythic coming-of-age tale.

Our Heroine's Journey must include elements that reflect choices made by young women today and the different values that motivate women compared to men.

Choices like whether to have children or not. How about balancing family and work lives? Men don't really face those challenges as much as women. Or how about the myriad relationships that women have: friends, family, lovers, co-workers? A woman often supports everyone else's journey instead of her own. Finally, don't forget how a woman often puts others above her own glory or survival. She's quite the humble hero.

See how the Heroine's Journey will split from the Hero's in unintended ways?

Or maybe your heroine's journey has nothing at all to do with challenges specific to women. Maybe she needs to save the planet from an asteroid or bring down a corrupt police commissioner or find a serial killer, and she is just simply far too busy for a romance!

So, don't throw Campbell's Hero's Journey out the window. Inherent in that model is a coming-of-age tale that works, regardless of gender. Someone, male or female, gets drawn into an adventure, much like Disney's Moana on her quest to save her people. The protagonist must be transformed in some way and become an epic champion people talk about for years.

The beauty of a realistic Heroine's Journey based on modern women's experience is she'll more than likely have a team of people she works with, instead of being a solo hero on her lone path. That means your job is much more fun because you get to create story arcs for each member of her team. Thus, more voices in your head and a full cast of characters.

Wouldn't a fresh, new look at Campbell's "Hero's Journey" from the perspective of a strong woman be great fodder for a story? This certainly doesn't mean that sex is off the table because we all know strong women can have sex with whomever they want. The only restriction is there can't be an undercurrent of romance anywhere in your story.

If you're working with a strong female protagonist, consider crafting her a Heroine's Journey.



▶ CHAPTER 17. WHY A FULLY REALIZED VILLAIN IS AS IMPORTANT AS YOUR PROTAGONIST

We're being bold: **Your antagonist can make the difference between a ho-hum novel and a break-out one.**

"What?" you say. "How can that be true?"

A fully realized villain is someone who shows us parts of ourselves in his or her makeup. If you can connect in some human way with the antagonist, it's going to bring up all kinds of tension for readers.

Let's think about some of the best books and movies out there to get a feel for real antagonists who are clearly a good match for their protagonist.

VOLDEMORT (OR HE-WHO-MUST-NOT-BE-NAMED)

Voldemort is a brilliant example of a villain. He is introduced as having done the very thing that children fear most: he murdered Harry Potter's parents in cold blood.

Harry and Voldemort represent the polarities of good and evil. Throughout the series, however, we learn more about Voldemort's journey which is strangely parallel to Harry's: both were orphans, both were raised by cruel and uncaring non-wizards, both attended Hogwarts, both are Parselmouths and their wands share the same core.

Yet while many circumstances of their lives run parallel, the choices that they make are markedly different, sending their lives and their viewpoints in opposite directions.

DARTH VADER

Of course, Darth Vader has to be on the list. Darth Vader is an excellent three-dimensional antagonist. There were several key events in Anakin Skywalker's life that led to him following the road toward the dark side. Through their conflict, Luke can see two paths ahead of him: to follow in his father's footsteps and take power with the dark side or become a Jedi knight and fight for good.

But, in the end, we see that Darth Vader is conflicted too. Even after all those years being the villain, he still finds some shred of humanity when it comes down to it.

THE JOKER

The Joker continually foils Batman in dastardly ways that would have broken other heroes. Heath Ledger played the part best, saying "Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos."

Funnily enough, this symbiotic relationship where Batman and The Joker are completely dependent on each other might be best illustrated in the new *Lego Batman Movie*. Batman refuses to acknowledge The Joker as his number one foe, pretending instead that he is inconsequential to Batman's life. Because of this slight, The Joker loses it and sets out to destroy Gotham City. The intricacies of their interdependent relationship are caricatured throughout the film to great hilarity.

HOW DO YOU CREATE THE PERFECT VILLAIN?

HUMANIZE THEM AND MAKE THEM RELATABLE

The first step is to realize that your antagonist is a person, too. He has dreams and fears, past hurts that have changed him, and a goal that, in his mind, is just and rational.

If you can create an antagonist with characteristics and thoughts your readers can identify with, you've hit the jackpot in villains. Because readers love to hate an antagonist; and they hate to love an antagonist.

Sometimes what can scare the socks off readers is realizing how an antagonist reminds them of something inside themselves. **Your readers will react strongly if they can see even a sliver of themselves in the motives or actions of the bad guy.**

USE THEM AS A MIRROR

One way to create a believable antagonist is to mirror your protagonist's problems. Draw out his human side and give him deep emotions and a mission that coincides with or opposes your main character's.

Your hero and your villain will follow a similar path: there will be some triggering event in their lives that



sets them off on their journey; they will experience successes and obstacles that affect their worldview; and both will be fighting to defend something that they truly believe in.

Mirroring your characters allows you to show their similarities but highlight their differences. Your antagonist can help your main character learn and grow, strengthening his resolve.

Perhaps your protagonist lacks some important character trait at the beginning of your story.

How can they learn and grow through a mirror character who exudes that trait?

SHOW THEIR POINT OF VIEW

Give your antagonist some viewpoint time. When readers get to see through the eyes of the antagonist and how they believe in what they're doing—and more importantly, why they believe in it—you'll capture your readers' attention.

Give your antagonist an origin story that evokes emotion in readers. Show us how she came to be the way she is. **Or better yet, make your reader see things from the bad guy's perspective, even if just for a little while.**

And it's all about keeping readers engaged with a tense, evocative story, right?

STAY AWAY FROM STEREOTYPICAL EVIL VILLAINS

Pure evil has been done. Think of the serial killer who used to torture small animals when he was younger and now stalks prostitutes because his mother abandoned him. How cliché.

Here are some other clichés to avoid:

- The evil villain bent on world domination
- The evil villain with an underground lair
- The evil villain with the disadvantaged childhood
- The evil villain who falls in love with the damsel in distress

Do any of these make you yawn?

One caveat: certain horror or supernatural novels have pure evil beings the protagonist must conquer. A demon or a werewolf probably won't have human emotions. But more on this in the next chapter.

Start respecting your antagonist and give him some character traits that will give readers the shivers—because they see a little bit of themselves in the villain.

Couple that with an unforgettable story, and you've got the beginnings of a breakout novel.



▶ CHAPTER 18. CREATING REALISTIC, BELIEVABLE MONSTERS

MERRIAM-WEBSTER DEFINES **MONSTER** AS:

1. an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure
2. a threatening force
3. an animal of strange or terrifying shape
4. something monstrous, such as a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty

A monster is different from a villain. It is something abnormal, threatening, and terrifying. It must be terrifying.

Great monsters are inherently inhuman. Your characters may search for any human qualities (physical, emotional, social or others), but it's all the more frightening when it looks terrifying and its behavior is incomprehensible.

On the other hand, humans and aliens who look like the rest of us can be horrifying monsters in their behaviors or morals. So, looks can't always predict monstrosity.

Author **Philip Athans** writes:

“In *The Guide to Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction*, I defined a monster as ‘any creature of a species that is neither a part of the civilization of sentient people or among the ranks of mundane flora and fauna.’ And I further simplified this by simply saying, ‘A monster is different and scary.’ It’s something you wouldn’t expect to meet on the street—including on the street of a fantasy world or the engineering decks of a future starship.”

WHAT MAKES A MONSTER SCARY?

Rather, ask yourself, “What are people afraid of?” You could Google “phobias” or ask your family and friends what they’re most afraid of. What you’re looking for is an irrational fear. What would literally paralyze someone when confronted by it?

If you take the top ten phobias, start with number ten on the list. That’s the first characteristic of a good monster. Then, to escalate your readers’ fear, add characteristics from common phobias.

For example, arachnophobia—the fear of spiders—is pretty common. So is the fear of flying. Put those two fears together to create a monstrous spider creature on a plane. Wait—wasn’t that the premise behind the movie *Snakes on a Plane*? Surely you can do better.

Maybe instead, you could create a monstrous flying spider creature that swoops down on its prey. Imagine if it played a nasty little game of dropsy with victims, letting them fall and catching them before they hit the ground. That might scare a few readers.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS TO MAKE YOUR MONSTER ÜBER SCARY INCLUDE:

1 UNPREDICTABILITY

When you know how a person or an animal is most likely going to act, you’re not very afraid. But when you add the element of unpredictability into the mix, you can ratchet up the tension. The less your reader knows about how your monster will act and react, the better.

2 VIOLENT TENDENCIES

It’s completely up to you how much gore your story contains because more gore does not equal more terror. Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* features a grisly scene where a soldier is skinned alive, and it’s pretty harrowing. But it’s so well done psychologically and emotionally that you don’t need the gore to picture the scene.

3 OTHERNESS

They’re not like you and me. They have that “otherness” that is outside of our practical experience



with beings. It could be another planet or solar system, or it could be a supernatural otherness. But when it's unknown, you can make it even more terrifying.

4 AMORALITY

We expect laws, rules, and norms of society to be upheld, which is why there are harsh consequences when someone breaks the law. A monster has total disregard for human society and its moral and ethical standards. It does whatever it wants without worrying about others' rights or feelings. And it's chilling when your monster does it without emotion or hesitation.

5 UNCONTROLLABLE

Your readers generally like to be in control of certain things. When something is uncontrollable, it brings up feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Monsters can and should play unfair to make readers even more uncomfortable.

6 PREDATORY

Human beings are used to being at the top of the food chain. A monster who turns that model on its head, making humans its prey, can be terrifying. Monsters that are perfect killing machines that hunt humans scare the pants off of readers. Think about the movie *Alien*.

7 TRANSFORMATION

What about a human being that transforms into a monster? *The Exorcist* by William Peter Blatty scared me so much that I had to sleep with the lights on for weeks. Possession and transformation movies and books are always scary because we're afraid of transforming into something other, something we can't control. Think of the movie *The Fly*, or the myriad stories about vampires, werewolves, mummies and zombies. Finally, think about something normal transforming into something dangerous like Stephen King's *Cujo* or Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

HOW TO WRITE A MONSTER

Author Philip Athans has a wonderful form in his book *Writing Monsters: How to Craft Believably Terrifying Creatures to Enhance Your Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction*. The form gives you a structure on which to create the perfect monster. Athans asks you to answer the following questions with your monster in mind:

- What is it called?
- What does it eat, and how does it eat?
- How does it move?
- Where does it come from?

- What does it look like? This includes its overall form, head, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, limbs and more.
- How big is it?
- What covers its body, and what color is it?
- How smart is it?
- What motivates it?
- What scares it?
- What hurts it?
- What senses does it possess?
- In what ways is it better or more powerful than the average person?
- In what ways is it weaker than the average person?

Consider how your monster can be both villain and monster in your story. Dracula is a monster, right? He's other, he's transformed into something scary and uncontrollable. But he's also the villain. He's intelligent, creative, and has emotions—unlike a monster who is born or made that way.

Monsters can even be heroes. Check out the movie *Hellboy* if you don't believe me.

MONSTERS NEED MOTIVE

Everything that happens in your novel must have a reason. Your monster shouldn't show up because you've always wanted to write one. It must have a purpose. Know your monster intimately and why it's in your story.



▶ CHAPTER 19. CONSTRUCTING YOUR FULL CAST

Your novel may be populated to the rafters with interesting characters who each have an important role to play. Or you may focus on a few key characters whose interaction and motivations really drive the plot. Either way, you need to know how to create a full cast of characters that keeps readers turning the pages until the very end.

In Victoria Schmidt's *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters*, she talks about three categories of supporting cast members for your novel: friends, rivals and symbols. In this final chapter, we take a close look at each.

FRIENDS

They mean well, but sometimes friends can cause a lot of trouble. They may tell the hero something wrong or forget to tell him or her something important. Friends are also great at getting themselves kidnapped or into other dangerous situations, thus your hero or heroine may have to postpone their quest to rescue their friend. Here are the four types of supporting friends:

THE MAGI

Magi are all-knowing, wise and powerful. They help the hero avoid situations and problems but, more often than not, have the hero figure out problems for himself. The magi is the teacher; the hero is the student—much like Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*.

THE MENTOR

The mentor is more like the hero than the magi. He offers his best advice and tries to help the protagonist with his problems. But the mentor may need help himself at some point. Morpheus played by Laurence Fishburne in *The Matrix* is the perfect mentor.

THE BEST FRIEND

Your protagonist shares everything with his best friend. This character is always there, but not always able to help the protagonist out of a situation. He sometimes even messes up the situation worse. Some best friends don't want to see the protagonist change and this can create conflict. Ron Weasley is the perfect example of a best friend.

THE LOVER

This is the character in your book that offers love and security to your hero. It can come in the form of a romantic relationship, a child or parent, or even a pet (think of Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*).

RIVALS

A rival differs from a villain in that he or she is an adversary who doesn't directly oppose your protagonist's goal, but dislikes your protagonist and want to get them somehow. They have a blast messing things up. Newman on *Seinfeld* is the classic example of a rival who likes to "play" with the main character.

Rivals don't always feel hatred for protagonists, or their hatred can be unconscious. There may even be times when a rival can help your hero—but only to a point. They love the power they wield to thwart your hero.

When creating a rival, consider how he or she may feel like they were always in competition with your hero, is jealous of what your main character has, or feels smarter than your protagonist and is out to prove it.

SYMBOLS

These supporting characters mean something important to your hero. They can symbolize the past, your hero's faults or who he is trying to become.

Here are the three types of symbols to consider:

THE SHADOW

This character mirrors your protagonist's flaws or dark side, and your hero will try to avoid him because of it. But eventually he must face his faults and fears represented by the shadow and his shortcomings. For example, if your main character is afraid of going insane, the shadow can be someone struggling with psychoses.

THE LOST SOUL

This symbolizes your heroine's past, always a reminder of where she came from and what she's trying to change. Your protagonist worries about becoming just like the lost soul if she doesn't achieve her goal. An old friend from your main character's childhood who hasn't changed and is stuck in the past is a lost soul. Or



a lost soul could be the person who gave up his or her dreams to support a family and is unhappy.

THE DOUBLE

The double is well-rounded, secure, grounded—exactly who your hero wants to become. Your protagonist could either admire the double or be jealous and critical of him. The double is the expert in the field that your hero wants to be in. He's often unreachable and unavailable. Say your main character is a writer who dreams of becoming the next Stephen King, owns all of his novels, and moons over his witticisms on Twitter. Sometimes the double who is attainable can become a guru or a guide for your hero, and sometimes he causes conflict. Consider how Luke Skywalker wants to become just like his father in *Star Wars*. Little does he know his father is actually Darth Vader. Another great double example is Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy wants strength, intelligent and goodness—everything Glinda possesses.

Use any of these supporting cast members to help you create full and round characters populating your novel. Even better, mix and match your supporting characters to give your protagonist fits and conflicts that increase the tension. As your hero journeys forth, look for subplots of supporting characters that will add drama and more tension along the way.



▶ CONCLUSION

Characters are the heart of your story. You can have the best plot in the world, but a flat character will turn readers away. If you haven't, we suggest you read Orson Scott Card's seminal book *Elements of Fiction Writing: Characters & Viewpoint*. Card's observations inspired a lot of this ebook. It's well worth the read.

If you've stuck with us until this point, you learned how to invent characters based on actions, motives, and their past. Archetypes—not stereotypes—should help inform your character's deeper motives and desires. You learned how to create an emotional connection to your protagonist for your reader that extends beyond real life. And you should now know how to captivate your readers with amazing characters they both love... and hate.

We've delved into a bit of psychology, hammered out character traits, and talked about why your female characters should be motivated by more than just romance. And if it's your thing, you learned how to create realistic, believable monsters.

Finally, you know to give your readers a villain they see pieces of themselves in. Villains are just as important as protagonists.

We hope you learned enough from these chapters to start creating real, three-dimensional, engaging and compelling characters, both the bad guys and the good. And maybe you uncovered a few ideas for the characters in your next novel. Now it's time to write!

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▶ ABOUT ProWritingAid



“...like having a real-life writing coach guide you.”

ProWritingAid analyzes your writing and highlights potential improvements. Each report focuses on a particular area of your writing.

Some reports will provide quick fixes that will allow you to polish up a short piece of writing. Other reports will go in depth and reveal areas where you can do more to improve your writing style.

While ProWritingAid is not going to do your job for you, it will make your job easier. You'll improve your writing style as you use the reports because you'll become more aware of the mistakes that you make, just like having a real-life writing coach guiding you. Not every suggestion will work for every writer, so you'll have to use your own judgement.

THE WRITING STYLE REPORT

The Writing Style Report is one of the most popular and comprehensive reports that ProWritingAid offers. We all know that there is a lot more to good writing than just correct grammar, and these suggestions are based on the same ideas you would learn in a university writing course.

The Style Report highlights several areas of writing that should be revised to improve readability, including: passive and hidden verbs, over-reliance on adverbs, repeated sentence starts, emotional tells and much more. These suggestions are the same as a professional copy-editor would give you (in fact many of them use ProWritingAid). If you are going to send your writing to a copy-editor then, by fixing all these mistakes upfront, your editor will be able to focus on the more important aspects of your work, such as tone of voice. You'll get a more polished piece of writing as a reward.

THE GRAMMAR REPORT

The Grammar Report is like Microsoft Word's grammar checker but with super powers. We use the latest artificial-intelligence algorithms to catch all those issues that Word's grammar checker misses. What's more, our team of copy-editors have input thousands of specific checks that they have come across in their years of editing. For example, they noticed that many writers write "adverse" when they actually mean "averse", so when this comes up, the software will offer a short explanation about how the two words are different. This additional understanding means you can make sure

you select the correct word not just this time, but every time. You'll eliminate all the embarrassing errors from your text and learn not to make them in the future.

THE OVERUSED WORDS REPORT

Writers should be wary of many words and phrases in the English language that are indicative of poor writing style. Intensifiers like "very", for example, actually weaken your writing, or hesitant words like "just" or "maybe" make your writing feel unconvincing. Words like these are fine in moderation, but when overused can undermine your ideas. In this report, we'll flag the problematic words and phrases that are commonly overused by writers, and help you to eliminate them. As you work through them, you will begin to recognize and avoid using them in the first place.

THE CLICHÉS AND REDUNDANCIES REPORT

Clichés are the crutch of the lazy writer! Don't rely on someone else's dusty old imagery. Brainstorm for innovative new ways to express your ideas. Fresh metaphors will leave a much stronger impression on your reader.

Never use two words when one will do the job. Redundant wording adds quantity to your writing, but not quality. Every word in your writing should be there for a reason. This report helps you eliminate the clutter.

THE STICKY SENTENCE REPORT

Sticky sentences wobble around without getting to the point. They are hard to follow, and should be rewritten to increase clarity.

Every sentence contains some words that don't have any actual meaning; they just hold your sentence together: *and*, *in*, *the*, *of*, etc. These glue words are empty spaces in your writing that your writer needs to get through to reach your meaning. Statistics show that published texts have a low percentage of glue words, and so should your writing.

THE READABILITY REPORT

Being a great writer is not about using fancy words – it's about communicating meaning to your readers. If they have to look up words or decipher your language in any way, they will be distracted from your ideas. This report uses the top readability tools out there, including the popular Flesch Reading Ease Score, to analyze your writing and highlight those sentences that will be hard for your reader to understand.

THE REPEATS CHECK

Writers often mistakenly use the same word several times in the span of one paragraph because it's foremost in their mind. But those repeats can set off an echo in the reader's mind – that subconscious feeling of "Didn't he just say that?" Too much of the same word or phrase can be irritating to read and, worse, it can detract from what you are trying to say. This report highlights repeated words and phrases in your document so you can use a more diverse vocabulary.

THE SENTENCE LENGTH REPORT

Writing that uses varying sentence lengths keeps the reader's brain engaged. Some should be short and punchy, others should be long and flowing. Sentence variety adds an element of music to your writing. ProWritingAid creates a visual representation of your sentence lengths so you can pick out areas where you should add more variety. Too many long sentences may result in a monotonous text, or too many short sentences may result in a choppy text. You can see at a glance where adding more short, medium or long sentences will round out the piece.

THE PRONOUN REPORT

Inexperienced writers often rely on pronouns to keep the narrative moving: "He did this", "She did that", "They ran there", "I found out." It's dull. On average, published writing contains only 4-15% pronouns. If your writing contains a higher percentage than that, then you need to replace your pronoun-heavy passages with more dynamic wording.

THE TRANSITION REPORT

Transition words are the road signs in writing – they help your reader move smoothly between ideas. Transitions like "similarly", "nevertheless", "in order to", or "as a result" help you show your readers how separate points go together to support your larger idea. They illustrate agreement, contrast or show cause and effect. One in every four sentences (25%) should contain a transition. If your transition score is less than 25%, you should consider adding more road signs.

THE CONSISTENCY CHECK

Consistency is essential in writing. It makes it feel professional and polished. The Consistency Check highlights inconsistency of spelling, hyphenation, capitalization, and punctuation. It also checks to make sure that you are consistently writing in either American English or British English.



THE PACING CHECK

Great fiction always contains fast-paced sections, such as dialogue and character action, as well as slow-paced sections, such as introspection and backstory. Both are essential to create a strong narrative and believable characters, but you never want your readers to feel bored or bogged down by too many long, slow passages. Use ProWritingAid to monitor your slow-paced sections to make sure your readers never lose interest.

THE DIALOGUE TAGS CHECK

Most dialogue tags, aside from “said” and “asked” break that cardinal rule of writing: show don’t tell. If you write “Jane exclaimed” after her dialogue, you are depending on a word to get Jane’s emotion across. Instead, show it to your reader with her actions. Describe how Jane’s eyes bulge with shock. Make everyone in the room turn to look at her outburst. Use ProWritingAid to highlight all your dialogue tags and get your emotion across in a stronger way.

THE CONTEXTUAL THESAURUS

The contextual thesaurus allows you to explore a range of synonyms by double-clicking any word. Unlike most thesaurus suggestions, our report offers replacement words that fit within that context of that sentence.

THE DICTION REPORT

When it comes to writing, less is more. Too often, writers try to sound authoritative by saying simple things in wordy ways. Why write “has the ability to” when you can write “can”? You’re just using more words to say the same thing, which makes your writing less clear. We’ll find these unnecessarily verbose phrases so you can make every word count.

THE ALLITERATION REPORT

Alliteration creates a pleasant rhythm when reading and so is often used in fiction, poetry and even advertising. Spark creativity by using ProWritingAid to highlight all instances of alliteration in your text.

THE HOMONYM CHECK

Homonyms are words that sound the same and are spelled alike but have different meanings – and they slip past spellcheckers all the time! Our check will also catch homographs (words that are spelled the same but sound different and have different meanings) and homophones (words that sound the same but have

different spellings and different meanings). If you write *He lost his patients* but really meant *He lost his patience*, your spellchecker won’t flag it as an error. The ProWritingAid tool will highlight every word in your document with a homonym, homograph and homophone so you can double-check that you have it correct.

THE ACRONYM CHECK

The Acronym Report creates a list of all the acronyms you have used. Misspelled or inconsistent acronyms are not usually picked up by normal spell-checkers, so this list allows you to easily scan for errors. It can also help you create a glossary of acronyms for your text.

THE HOUSE STYLE CHECK

Create customized reports to look for specific issues based on your needs. If you are a sports writer, input all the players’ names to make sure that they are spelled correctly. If you are a fashion designer, create a rule that “fall collection” should always be flagged and corrected to “autumn collection”. If you’re writing for a client, you can input their style guide rules into ProWritingAid and the software will flag any deviations for you. Create the ProWritingAid report that YOU need.

THE PLAGIARISM REPORT

Plagiarism is a major concern for many people, especially those writing academic works. The plagiarism checks performed by ProWritingAid will check your work against over a billion web-pages and articles to make sure that you have correctly cited any unoriginal content. It is easy for unoriginal content to slip into your work, and the consequences can be disastrous. You need to purchase credits to use our plagiarism checker, available from as little as \$10.

OVER 20 TOOLS IN ONE

We’ve just taken a look at some of our best writing and editing tools. ProWritingAid is continually evolving to make sure writers have everything they need in one piece of software. Try our free version now and see what **ProWritingAid** can do for you.